

Director's Monthly Message: Janel L. Forde



With the arrival of April, we have great hope that we are near the end of the COVID-19 restricted period. Vaccination rates are rising rapidly in Illinois and across the nation, and we continue to urge everyone to continue to practice the safe behaviors that we all can recite by now – **wear the mask, distance from others, wash hands frequently, no large group gatherings, get**

vaccinated when it is your turn – and most important, keep doing it all – even after vaccination!

The tide finally seems to be turning our way in this struggle with the virus, and yes, we have a long way to go before we can declare an end or at least a much-diminished viral threat. **After a year of COVID restrictions, we are moving toward a brighter, safer future as we keep our discipline, continue to protect ourselves and those around us, and seek enough vaccinations to achieve herd immunity across Illinois (and the entire nation) as quickly as possible.**

Our ability to work together through the many obstacles and pitfalls brought to light by COVID has been nothing short of amazing. It reflects our constancy of purpose and our understanding as a staff team that we can achieve our purpose despite our separation, despite our inability to meet collectively in person, and despite the personal negatives and challenges most every Illinois household has faced at one time or another during this ordeal. We meet our personal and professional challenges in much the same way.

I hear a few complaints that are largely understandable, but I also hear a lot of collaboration taking place that I find heart-warming and encouraging. **We have met devastating challenges with mind-boggling creativity from staff.** We know what we are here to do, and we will not be stopped or even slowed significantly in our efforts to achieve. These are not just platitudes. These are observations of how staff has reacted to the multitude of challenges we have dealt with.

I have said before that the creativity of our entire staff has been our key to success, especially during the past year. This month, we are featuring one outstanding member of our excellent CMS Legal team, Jim Lesniak, as our Exemplary Employee of the Month. **Make no mistake, the work of property management and the need for safe, adequate facilities for State agency services are of vital importance to the State's ability to deliver those needed services when**

and where they are required. Jim and the Legal team have supported the acquisition of multiple facilities, and CMS has acquired more needed properties since October 2020 than had been acquired in the previous six years or more.

Besides providing landing spots for multiple agency services, these needed property additions have enabled our statewide fight against COVID in many ways. **Two of those purchased facilities were warehouses for storing personal protective equipment (PPE) and in support of future logistical needs, and numerous leased locations were acquired early in the effort to provide desperately needed drive-thru testing facilities. Now we see fast growth in the numbers of mass vaccination facilities. The progress is obvious and impressive.**

These efforts parallel and enhance other work done through the **CMS Bureau of Property Management** to assist agency tenants and our own staff, along with the work of the CMS bureaus of **Strategic Sourcing, Agency Services, Administrative Hearings, Human Resources, the Business Enterprise Program**, and most other aspects of our own agency.

I remark on all this, first, to thank all involved in the work and to let you know that we notice, and we care. Additionally, I want you all to know how much we honor the work being done during this most difficult of times. We are continually gratified by the ongoing commitment and output of our staff, and we are not just encouraged, but truly excited at the gains we are making within the agency that will help us to take full advantage of the days when we finally can say: It is time to return to our office workplace and find out if the normal we knew still exists.

My hope is that we will discover a "normal," but it will not be what was. It will be better, more adaptable, and more effective. It will be the "normal" that we know is needed, that we know will carry us upward and closer to the State clients who depend on us.

We are discovering and outlining that time now, and I suspect it will take all our collective ingenuity and creativity to bring ourselves to the best ways of doing the business of the State for the years ahead.

Despite the obstacles, this CMS staff has put us in a position to be the best we have ever been at doing our work. It is the challenge we all face together – **to survive, and learn, and gain strength to embody the best – and then make it be our normal.**

Employee of the Month – James Lesniak, Legal



CMS Senior Property Management Counsel **James Lesniak** has been named the Exemplary Employee of the Month for April 2021.

Lesniak is recognized in part for his recent work in real estate acquisitions, leasing contracts, and other assistance in the relocation of State agency offices.

"This is quite a flattering honor, as I am used to staying in the background," Lesniak said when

informed of his selection. Lesniak's supervisors say his humility and understated approach are keys to his ability to get things done.

"Jim is effective in his work because he attends to detail and he brings all kinds of experience and expertise into his decision-making," said CMS General Counsel **Terry Glavin**.

Lesniak has spent most of his career in the private sector of real estate management, guiding clients in real estate law and transactions through a family title business, which he owned and operated for nearly 20 years.

After closing his business, he took a year off before joining CMS in November 2018 as a member of the **Legal Services Property Management Division** and, following attrition of key staff, has taken the lead on the **CMS Bureau of Property Management's (BoPM)** real estate transactional work. BoPM oversees all State-owned and leased facilities, including surplus property, with goals to reduce the overall number of leases, implement newer space where feasible, meet all utilization standards, limit costs, and reduce or eliminate any negative environmental impacts by using space most effectively.

"Honestly, I wasn't sure what I was signing up for when I joined CMS," Lesniak said. "What I found was that private-sector real estate and public-sector real estate are two entirely different worlds. ... Things that I might have slammed out in a week in the private sector, I find, for instance, that what might seem like a simple RFI (Request for Information) process involves more than 400 steps. Four hundred steps."

Lesniak and colleagues navigated the steps and other obstacles from COVID-19 restrictions to finalize the purchase of six facilities for State use since October 2020, including two warehouses used by the **Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA)** to store personal protective equipment (PPE) and create logistical options in the future, and an office building in the Chicago Loop to provide landing spots for agencies currently housed at James R. Thompson Center (JRTC).

"Six properties purchased since October is more than the State had purchased in the six or eight years previous," Lesniak said. "That was different. It required a significant effort by a lot of dedicated people."

Lesniak has been encouraged by the teamwork and support he has seen in **CMS Legal Services**, which provides legal and technical assistance to all CMS Bureaus.

"You never know how things will turn out, but I have received all the backup and support I could have asked for from the Legal team, and it has all been very collegial. I am very grateful for the way I've been received here," Lesniak said.

The feeling at CMS is mutual. "Jim is an invaluable, dedicated member of the CMS Legal Services' Team," Glavin said. "His broad knowledge, deep understanding of property law, and positive attitude are greatly appreciated within and outside CMS."

In his work itself, Lesniak "regularly directs, leads or assists his internal and external clients through complex real estate transactions," Glavin said. Lesniak also serves as the primary State contact for legal questions about real property and its use.

Property management work is always complex and necessary but has been especially impactful during periods of COVID restrictions since March 2020. As CMS has responded to the 2020 COVID challenge, BoPM and CMS Legal teams have seen unique demands, Glavin said. "Both areas responded with expertise and professionalism. Jim Lesniak is a notable standout in this work."

For his part, Lesniak has come to embrace the differences between the work in public vs. private sector and finds himself fulfilled in a different way by State property work.

"It feels like I'm helping out and making a difference for the State," Lesniak said. "In the private sector sometimes, you grind out quantities of work because you have to in order to help meet payroll and expenses, but here I can concentrate on the quality of work - getting it done right. That makes all the difference."



Safety Corner - Window Safety Week is April 4-11, 2021

With warmer temperatures arriving, it's important to practice **window safety** – especially in homes with young children. Windows are one of the few things we enjoy both inside and outside our homes and businesses. Windows serve an important role in our lives by letting in natural light and fresh air when open, and by keeping out the elements when they're closed. Some windows – larger units called egress or emergency escape and rescue windows – can take on an even greater role if we need to escape quickly in the event of a fire or other emergency, or if rescue workers need to enter through them in emergency situations.

Window Safety Week is observed during the first full week of April each year and was designed to heighten the awareness of what parents and caregivers should do to help keep their family and visitors safer from the risks of window falls or injuries in the home, and how they can use their windows for emergency escape and rescue purposes.

No matter where you live or what you do, whether you own or rent your home, live in a townhouse, apartment or standalone home in the city or the country, or are visiting in the home of another person, we all play a vital role in promoting window safety. **Window safety starts with learning the actions you can take to observe window safety and encouraging others to do so.** Responsible adults are the key to window safety. There's no substitute for adult supervision when it comes to keeping children safe.

Download the following resources to help keep your family prepared.

- [Window Safety Checklist](#)
- [Window and Door Home Safety Workbook for Kids](#)

Visit the [National Safety Council website](#) for more information and resources about window safety and much more.



Benefit Corner - April is Stress Awareness Month

Stress Awareness Month has been recognized every April since 1992, however this year it seems particularly important. Learning to cope with our stress and finding healthy ways to deal with these situations can go a long way in living a healthy and positive life. Long-term stress can prove to be more than just a mental issue.

We all experience stress, yet we experience it in different ways. For that reason there is no single definition for stress, but the [American Institute of Stress states](#) the most common explanation is a "physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension."



Common issues related to stress:

1. Headaches;
2. Stomach disorders;
3. Anxiety/Depression;
4. Stroke; and
5. Heart Disease.

Tips for Coping with Stress

- **Take care of yourself.** Eat healthy, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, give yourself a break if you feel stressed.
- **Discuss your problems.** Talk with a parent, friend, or another trusted source.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** Brain research now indicates that people exposed to stress are more likely to abuse alcohol or other drugs, or to relapse into drug addiction.
- **Recognize when you need more help.** Know when to talk to a psychologist, social worker, or counselor if things continue.

Anxiety can affect many aspects of your mental health and well-being. The next time you are feeling overwhelmed and anxious, [watch this video](#) and try these safety tips and much more.

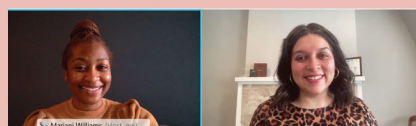
CMS Celebrates Women's History Month Recap

In recognition of **Women's History Month**, CMS hosted it's largest monthlong celebration to date, featuring women in government, business and all areas of leadership. This celebration was developed to support our efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in public service and statewide hiring. Standout women at CMS were also recognized by their managers for their exemplary work and support in agency operations.

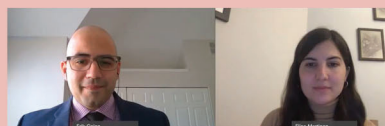
The CMS Women's History Month celebration kicked off on March 8, 2021 with an internal event, The View from CMS, in recognition of **International Women's Day** and continued throughout the month, with the **WomenIn series**. *WomenIn* featured panel discussions and

one on one interviews with women leaders in government operations, Law, public safety, communications, technology, innovation, wealth generation and strategic planning. CMS closed out the month on March 31, 2021 as a co-sponsor of **Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton's We Are One: Advocating for Self-Care** event which featured an engaging panel discussion about the ways that women and girls can practice self-care and advocate for healthier outcomes related to their mind, body and soul.

For more information, including links to session recordings and interviews, please visit cms.illinois.gov/whm.



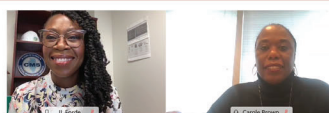
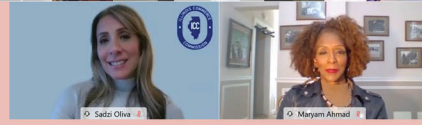
WomenIn Communications



WomenIn Public Safety: Kajanda Love



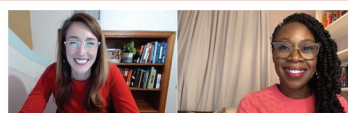
WomenIn Legal



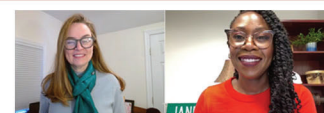
When Women Lead: Carole Brown



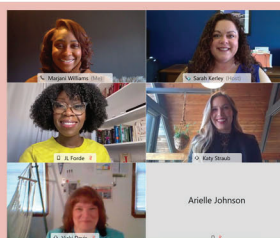
WomenIn Wealth Generation Part I



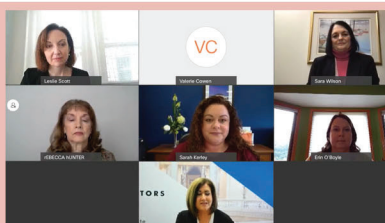
When Women Lead: Jamie Rodgers



When Women Lead: Margaret Weichert



The View from CMS



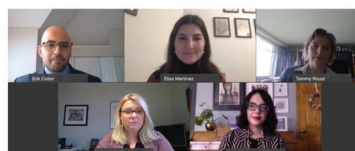
WomenIn Personnel and Labor Relations



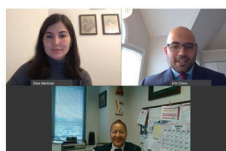
WomenIn Wealth Generation Part II



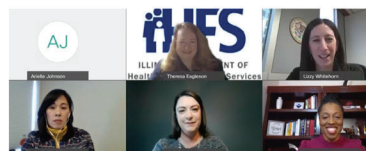
We Are One: Advocating for Self-Care



WomenIn Civic Technology



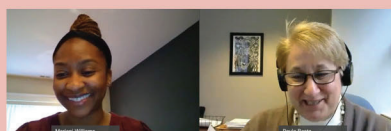
WomenIn Public Safety: Annette Nance-Holt



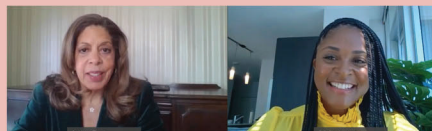
WomenIn Health and Human Services



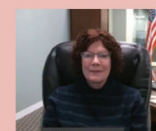
When Women Lead: Karen Freeman Wilson



When Women Lead: Paula Basta



When Women Lead: Andy Zopp



WomenIn Public Safety: Alicia Tate-Nadeau



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